

“Remarks on the two versions of the Old Norse translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth”

In this lecture, I would like to present some results of my study on the Old Icelandic *Brut*, the so called *Breta Sögur*. Since this workshop aims to work out a typology of the “Bruts” of Europe, I thought it relevant to study the interrelations of the Icelandic versions, and discuss the terms of “longer version” and “shorter version”, which traditionally describe them.

It is, indeed, commonly accepted that there are two versions of the Old Norse “Brut”. The longer version, principally kept in AM 573 4to, is said to be closer to Geoffrey than the shorter one, it is also more interested in chivalrous narrative developments. The shorter one, found in a famous compilation made in the 14th century manuscript called *Hauksbók* “Book of Haukr”, (“Hb”), is described as a historiographical, much abridged version. These assumptions are true, but need to be completed.

Since a complete synoptic edition is missing, not many studies have been published on the *Breta Sögur*. Until now, only the text kept in the Book of Haukr has been edited. If some of the important variant readings from manuscript AM 573 4to are available in the 1848 edition (bibl. 4), there are important omissions and other minor variant readings are absent. Before undertaking research on the relations between the two versions, I completed a transcription of AM 573 4to. Though it is still a work in progress, this transcription can be made available.

In the process, two important facts came to light:

1) the “longer version” is not only linked with the paper copy of Órmsbók (Stock Papp. 58, “O1”), but it also has much in common with a Galfridian section kept in a third Icelandic manuscript of the 14th century, manuscript AM 764 4to of the Arnamagnæan Institute in Copenhagen, studied by Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir (bibl.6).

2) AM 573 4to is a manuscript consisting of two parts bound together (or copied one after the other). Jonna Louis-Jensen had already stated, in her paleographical introduction to the edition of the “Saga of the Trojans”, that AM 573 4to was written by two different hands (bibl.5). An important new statement is that the two of them are articulated in a way that matters a lot to our questioning. Indeed, in this “Saga of the Britons”, there seems to be an articulation between the history of the British kings *before* and *after* the reign of Arthur (more accurately, Uther Pendragon). This division corresponds to the change of hands in AM 573 4to, and might lead us to think differently about the “chivalric” and “Arthurian” inspiration in this manuscript.

I shall give a brief presentation of all existing versions in Old Icelandic, and say a few words about their relations to each other and to the source, and then I shall try to discuss the relevance of the distinction between “shorter” and “longer” versions.

In order to study the relations between the different versions of the *Breta Sögur*, we must take into account a manuscript which has not been examined yet as a witness in the “Breta Sögur” tradition: AM 764 4to, a big Icelandic compilation from the 14th century. This compilation contains a large section copied after Geoffrey (paragraphs 6 to 64), but does not bear any obvious title which can draw attention to it as a “saga of the Britons”. Indeed, the section has been inserted in a universal history.

There is some evidence that the frame was given, partially and/or indirectly, by Petrus Comestor’s *Historia Scholastica*. The *Historia Scholastica*, often called a “moralized Bible”

by the specialists, gives a general approach of world history in parallel sections. Though its main topic is Jewish-Christian history, it also provides an account of the history of the other contemporaneous reigns. It is structured according to a recognizable frame: the Augustinian division of world history into the six ages. This frame makes it easy to interlace the history of different reigns; thus, we find the Galfridian section inserted within a part of the compilation that deals with the fifth age. It is - only temporarily - limited to Geoffrey's paragraphs up to the Incarnation: up to § 64 of the *Historia Regum Britanniae*. The manuscript has suffered damage, and some of it has been lost, including Galfredian materials.

It has been proved by Svanhildur Oskarsdóttir and Jonna Louis-Jensen that the person who copied both this section in 764 and the Brut in manuscript 573 (first hand) are one and the same (bibl. 5 and 6). The similarity between these two texts is therefore established from a *paleographical* point of view. The transcription of 573 confirmed a general parenthood between all the existing versions from a *textual* point of view.

Given the differences in length, it is impossible to do a line-to-line collation of all texts. Nevertheless, there are obvious matches:

-Episodes or references that are common to all the Icelandic texts, but do not go back to Geoffrey. It is for example obvious that the first part of the *Breta Sögur*, namely the "Aeneas" part, was known to the person who copied 764.

-Readings that are common to 764 and 573, where Hb has a different text: sometimes a part of a sentence, sometimes several sentences are identical. A longer list of them is to be given in my forthcoming study of the *Breta Sögur*.

-One part of the text is common to 764 and Hb, where 573 no longer exists. This common passage does not occur in the above-mentioned Galfridian section of 764, but in a fragment, folio 38 of manuscript 764. This fragment contains the end of the "Brut", starting from the story of Brian until the end of Geoffrey. The collation of this fragment in 764 which shall be displayed in my forthcoming study, reveals a clear affiliation with Haukr's version of the "Brut".

These observations lead to a few preliminary conclusions:

- 1) It is now ascertained that all Icelandic versions go back to one Icelandic source. Therefore, the "shorter version" and the "longer version" do not derive from two different Latin models, but show evidence of a different use of the same one.
- 2) If it is relevant to speak of a "longer version" in 573, we should nevertheless keep in mind its proximity to 764. Indeed, the "Brut" in 764 is anything but chivalrous and romanced. Quite the opposite: in the very few places where the text is a little less abridged than usual, the text of 764 shows no interest in chivalrous tradition. And there is no way to know what the Arthurian section looked like in 764 before its mutilation –if ever there was an Arthurian section. If the same person is responsible for both the "Brut" in 764 and 573, then it is not necessarily someone who was interested in the Arthurian stories as an entertainment.

I shall therefore go back to the opposition between 573 and Hb.

Different arguments have been produced to oppose the versions to each other:

-Haukr's version deals more with the historical background and its political consequences. In some places, his text offers additions which do not belong to Geoffrey, and do not go back to sources that are common to the other "*Bruts*". These additions probably derive from his own knowledge of other historical texts belonging to a connected tradition (that is to say, late-antique renderings of the history of Rome, of Troy, but also national history, or encyclopaedic works). Haukr is interested in developing the connections between royal houses in Europe, and especially between the latter and the house of Norway. He has, therefore, a tendency to introduce references to Norwegian kings: he does so at least twice in the text, and it is very likely that these two interpolations are his. Generally speaking, his text can be described as one that makes more political profit of the theory of the Trojan origin than the other texts. He is also, on the whole, inclined to abbreviate the text, and sometimes follows his source only from afar, by shortening it up, especially in the paragraphs dealing with the reign of Arthur.

-AM 573 4to, on the other hand, is both closer to Geoffrey – and therefore, has a longer text- and especially interested in Arthur. Characteristics of this version are, for instance, the narrative interpolations or additions which occur during what could be called the "Arthurian period" (starting with Uther). The first addition tells us about Uther Pendragon's trick not only to seduce Igera and take her husband's appearance, but also to have her love him, after he has come to the unavoidable conclusion that she will never accept him. The text tells us about another of Merlin's tricks: in our case, a love-potion. And only after Igera has drunk the philter does she accept the king as a new husband.

The second narrative addition appears at the end of the text, and is another tale of treasonous seduction (I am not implying that this motive could be a cause for narrative expansion, it is only an observation): it takes place at the end of Arthur's reign, when the victorious Arthur has conquered Rome, and has left the traitor Mordred back in Britain. In this version, the general arrangement is different than the Geoffrey texts I know of: there is a dialogue between Mordred and the queen, a conversation in which she does not immediately surrender to his arguments; Arthur sits in Rome when he is told about the treason by a messenger; this character named "Koronandus", secretly leaves Britain one night and sails to Rome to tell his master of Guenevere's treason. Unfortunately, the episode ends here, because it is shortened by a lacuna. Since the manuscript has a unique version here, we cannot fill in the gap. The manuscript only starts again at the very end of the Galfridian chronicle, where it tells us about Arthur's death.

To these two "Arthurian" additions, which were already transcribed in the 1848 edition, we should add the fact that in this manuscript, the *Breta Sögur* stop immediately after Arthur's death. They are put to end after a sentence deprived of the usual references and dedications, and after a capital letter the text passes on to a story known elsewhere as the tale of "Valver" (Gawain).

For its part, Hb goes on with the end of the British reign. After a very short and heavily rewritten section dealing with the last British kings, Haukr passes on to the English domination. Though his rendering is very brief, he keeps enough of Geoffrey for us to confirm that his source was complete.

As we have stated previously, the author of 764 also had knowledge of these chapters, for a fragment of them is left on folio 38. Together with the certainty that all Icelandic versions go back to the same source, this leads us to conclude that the way in which

manuscript 573 ends its version of Geoffrey is, in one way or another, voluntary. The presence of the Gawain-adventure is probably not a coincidence either.

To what extent do all these observations change the usual description of the Icelandic “Brut” in terms of “longer” and “shorter” versions?

Concerning the difference in length, what is said about Hb is not entirely true: the Hb version is almost as long as the 573 version, not only because it follows Geoffrey’s text until the very end, but also because it includes a translation of the prophecy. The writer of 573 has cut it out, explaining why: the prophecy is already well known, and has been looked into by “many wise men in England”. In itself, the skaldic version of the prophecy which has been inserted in Hb is of such a length that it almost makes good for the length-difference between the two versions. And it is not always true that Haukr is reluctant to keep short stories, funny episodes or anecdotes in his text: he has, for instance, kept the episode of the giant stones, whereas manuscript 573 has cut it out. But on the whole, it is true that Hb does not pay any particular attention to Arthur’s reign, and considerably reduces this part of the text, although, in this part of the text as in others, he does not have another source than the one that is used by the transcriber of 573.

Concerning the source, there is enough evidence to demonstrate that it is common to Hb and 573 for the Arthurian part as well as for the rest of the text. One major proof is an Arthurian tale interpolated in both versions: the tale of Ritho the giant. This tale does not appear in Geoffrey, but is mentioned briefly as an ancient adventure, and can be compared with the episode of the giant of Mont Saint Michel. Both Icelandic versions have inserted a short episode based on this allusion. We can safely conclude from this important addition and a few other items, that Haukr and 573 do follow the same source in this part of the text, as in the previous part.

An important piece of information needs to be added about 573, concerning the changing of hands that occur between folio 45 and 46: Hand number 2 takes over at a crucial point of the text, namely, the story of Arthur’s conception; besides, the importance of the transition is made clear by the use of a large ornate capital (fol.46r). This kind of ornament appears only once in what is kept of the manuscript.

The hand who copied the “Brut” in 764 as mentioned above, is also responsible for the “Brut” in 573. This hand is *hand number 1* in 573, and is actually responsible for all the text up to fol. 45v in 573, that is to say, including the “Pseudo Dares” part which precedes the “Brut”. An examination of folio 38 in 764 confirmed that it was written by this very same hand as well. For all we know, then, this person copied the whole of the Trojan-Briton cycle in 573, and did a much shorter version of the same work in 764. This person clearly had knowledge of other Galfridian materials than what has come down to us: this is proved by the remnants of fragment 38; but there is nothing left of any Arthurian text copied by this scribe.

The Arthurian part in 573, the part that starts with Arthur’s conception in folio 46, was copied by someone else. Therefore, if there is an interest in romance and/or Arthurian tales in the so-called longer version, it is not true of the whole text, but only of the *second part*, which is really entirely about the Arthurian period.

As a conclusion to this presentation, I would like to say that our terminology, which may be somewhat misleading, has forced upon us the idea of an independent text called “Breta Sögur”, and a simplifying view of its textual tradition.

Following the above-mentioned observations, I would rather adopt a new terminology based on a new division (at least if I were to describe manuscript 573): the first part of the manuscript, written by hand number 1, has copied the Trojan-Briton cycle before Arthurian times. Hand number 2 is responsible only for the story of Arthur. I would therefore prefer speaking of three sagas: a “Saga of the Trojans”, a “Saga of the Britons” (beginning with a long Vergilian prologue), and a “Saga of Arthur”. Given the arguments I have presented, a

possibility is not to be ruled out: that the Arthurian part of the “Brut” circulated as an independent saga at a certain time, after having been copied from the original translation. Nevertheless, the ultimate Galfridian source which was used in all cases, is one and the same.

Manuscripts of the *Breta Sögur*, “Histories of the Britons”: basic description

- 1) -“**Hauksbók**”, AM 371, **AM 544** and AM 675 4to. Icelandic mostly, with the participation of Norwegian hands. The part of the codex bearing number AM 544 4to which contains the *Brut* is kept in Reykjavík, at the Institute Stofnun Árna Magnússonar. Compiled by an Icelandic historiographer, Haukr Erlendsson, in the 14th century. Haukr wrote a part of the book, and had other parts written by Norwegian and Icelandic scribes. The Dares and Geoffrey material are by his own hands. The two other parts of the codex, AM 371 4to and AM 675 4to, are kept in Copenhagen, at the Arnamagnæanske Institute.
- 2) -**AM 764 4to**, Icelandic, kept in Copenhagen, at the Arnamagnæanske Institute. Compiled at the end of 14th century. Attributed to the “school of Akrar”, a group of Icelandic male scribes working in collaboration with the abbey of women at Reynistaður: a group of ten scribes compiled the book, possibly men and women.
- 3) -**AM 573 4to**, Icelandic, kept in Copenhagen, at the Arnamagnæanske Institute, 14th century. Two hands appear in the manuscript, the first hand also wrote the Galfridian section on folios 11-12v and on fol. 38r. in AM 764 4to; the other has been identified as the copyist of “Möðruvallabók”, AM 132 4to (Icelandic, kept in Reykjavík at the Institute Stofnun Árna Magnússonar).
- 4) -**Stockholm, Papp. 58**, paper copy made by an Icelander in 1690, kept at the Royal Library of Stockholm. The text is a copy of a lost Icelandic compilation named “Ormsbók”.

***Bruts* and Galfridian sections in the four manuscripts:**

- 1) **Hauksbók**: fol. 36r-59r, independent “Brut”, starts with a long Virgilian section; the manuscript contains a translation of *Pseudo-Dares* (mixed source) immediately before the Virgilian beginning of the *Brut*. Title on fol. 36r: “Her hefr Breta sogvr” (“here start the histories of the Britons”).
- 2) **AM 764 4to**: fol. 11r7-11r12: Troy-Aeneas (mixed sources common to the other Icelandic *Bruts*)// 11r13-11v4: section of Jewish history up to the Incarnation// 11v4-12v41: *Brut*, from Aeneas and Brutus up to the Incarnation// from 13r1-14r22: section of Roman history starting with Romulus and Remus up to the Incarnation. + folio 38r, fragments of an acephalous account of the *HRB*, § 204 to 208.
- 3) **AM 573 4to**: fol 24r-45v (hand 1); 46r-63r9 (hand 2): *Brut* beginning with a more thorough Virgilian section. On 63r10 after a capital letter begins the *Valvers þáttr*, the “branch of Gawain”. Fol 24r bares only the title: “Sagan Af Enea hinum fræga eður Brettlands Konga Sogur”. (“Story of the mild Aeneas or Histories of the Kings of Britain”).

- 4) **Stockholm, Papp. 58:** modern (erratic) pagination. The *Brut* starts on a page numbered 130; following this numbering, it ends on page 265.

The portion of the *Historia Regum Britanniae* covered by each version:

- 1) **Hauksbók:** *Historia Regum Britanniae*, the whole text, including an earlier rewriting of Merlin's Prophecy in skaldic verse, inserted in the text.
- 2) **AM 764:** *Historia Regum Britanniae*, § 6-64 + § 204-208
- 3) **AM 573, 4to:** *Historia Regum Britanniae*, §6-178
- 4) **Stockholm Papp 58:** *Historia Regum Britanniae*, § 6-79 (§79 incomplete)

Selected bibliography on the “Breita Sögur” (sources, connected texts and manuscripts):

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2. -Jón Helgason ed., *Hauksbók*, The Arna-Magnæan Manuscripts, vol. 5, Ejnar Munksgaard, Copenhagen 1960 (fac simile edition).
3. -Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, *Universal History in 14th-Century Iceland. Studies in AM 764 4to*. PhD, University College, London, 2000 (edition of the Universal History in AM 764 4to).
4. -Jón Sigurðsson, *Annaler for Nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie*, 1848, p. 3-101. (Text of *Hauksbók* with a few variant readings from AM 573 4to).
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6. -Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, “Genbrug I Skagafjörður: Arbejdsmetoder hos skrivere i klostret på Reynistaður”, in *Reykholtt som Makt-og Lærdomscenter I den islandske og nordiske kontekst*, ed. By Else Mundal, Reykholt, Snorrastofa, 2006, p. 141-153.
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Hélène Tétrel
Université de Bretagne Occidentale/UEB
Centre de Recherche Bretonne et Celtique